

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1511

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FOR NEA/ARN DRAPER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY, US
SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWRY: SHALOM'S MARCH VISIT AND STATUS OF MARRIAGE
PROPOSALS

REF: STATE 68134

1. SHALOM, ACCOMPANIED BY WIFE AND MOTHER, VISITED SYRIA
MARCH 4 THROUGH 16. DCM MET THEM AT AIRPORT AND ASSISTED
IN CLEARING EXTRAORDINARY AMOUNT OF BAGGAGE THROUGH CUSTOMS.

2. IN DAMASCUS AND ALEPPO SHALOM WAS WARMLY WELCOMED BY
JEWISH COMMUNITIES AND MADE FULL REVIEW OF COMMUNITIES'
AFFAIRS. OVER LUNCH WITH AMBASSADOR HE DESCRIBED OVERALL
SITUATION OF BOTH COMMUNITIES AS MUCH IMPROVED EVEN FROM
HIS LAST VISIT AND QUESTIONED US WHETHER FUTURE VISITS ON
HIS PART WOULD BE NECESSARY OR REALLY HELPFUL. WE
ASSURED HIM HE WAS PLAYING VITAL ROLE IN WHOLE PROCESS.
SHALOM ALSO ARRANGED FOR RABBIS FROM DAMASCUS AND ALEPPO
TO VISIT KAMISHLI ON REGULAR BASIS TO SLAUGHTER MEAT AND
PERFORM RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES. PREVIOUS KAMISHLI
RABBI WAS AMONG 40 MEMBERS OF KAMISHLI COMMUNITY WHO
HAD LEFT ILLEGALLY TO TURKEY SINCE SHALOM'S LAST VISIT.
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IN ADDITION, 80 MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY HAVE MOVED TO
ALEPPO; THUS ENTIRE KAMISHLI COMMUNITY NOW NUMBERS ABOUT
280 PERSONS (20 FAMILIES).

3. SHALOM'S OFFICIAL CONTACTS: IN ADDITION TO VISITING
SECURITY OFFICIALS MESSAOUD AND ABD AL-SAMED, SHALOM,
ACCOMPANIED BY TOUTAH AND HAMRA, CALLED IN FONMIN

DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS SHOULFI, AND ON MARCH 15 WE ARRANGED FOR HIM TO BE RECEIVED ALONE BY DEPFONMIN QADDAR. HE REPORTED PLEASANT EXCHANGE WITH QADDAR ON ENTIRE SYRIAN JEWISH QUESTION REGARDING MARRIAGE PETITIONS. QADDAR TOLD SHALOM THAT MATTER WAS UNDER STUDY AND DECISION WOULD BE REACHED SOON. HE THOUGHT DECISION WOULD BE FAVORABLE, BUT GAVE NO INDICATION OF POSSIBLE TIMING.

4. SHALOM DEPARTED MARCH 16 WITH REVISED LIST OF 51 UNMARRIED WOMEN WHO WISH TO DEPART SYRIA FOR US. TOUTAH DELIVERED REVISED LIST TO US MARCH 17 (COPY BEIGN POUCHED NEA/ARN). THIS LIST INCLUDES 45 NAMES FROM LAST BATCH OF PETITIONS, 3 NAMES FROM ORIGINAL BATCH OF PETITIONS WHICH DID NOT ARRIVE IN TIME TO BE INCLUDED, LILY HAMRA, WHO WAS MARRIED TO CHARLES BETESH LAST JULY AND TWO NEW NAMES. IN ADDITION, TOUTAH ASKED US MARCH 17 TO ASK SHALOM WHETHER A 52ND NAME, BAHIEH BAKRI BUCAI, COULD BE ADDED. SHE IS A TEACHER AND WAS ON THE ORIGINAL LIST IN SHALOM'S POSSESSION.

5. SHALOM LEFT OPTIMISTIC THAT FAVORABLE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT DECISION WOULD BE FORTHCOMING IN NEAR FUTURE. COMMUNITY LEADERS ARE LESS HOPEFUL, NOTING BOTH THE POSSIBLE NEGATIVE EFFECT OF RECENT EVENTS IN THE AREA AND FACT THAT THIS LIST IS MUCH LONGER THAN THE FIRST ONE. WE ALSO QUESTION HOW QUICKLY SYRIAN GOVERNMENT WILL ACT ON THIS NEW REQUEST
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AND HOW FORTHCOMING THEY WILL BE. BELIEVE HOWEVER, WHEN MATTER IS RAISED WITH ASSAD, HE WILL REMAIN FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISE TO CARTER TO TREAT ISSUES AS HUMANITARIAN QUESTION BUT WILL INSIST ON CASE-BY-CASE REVIEW. SHOULFI TOLD ME EARLIER THIS WEEK THAT A REPLY HAD COME BACK FROM THE PRESIDENCY TO INITIAL QUESTION OF AMBASSADOR QABBANI ABOUT CERTIFYING PETITIONS IN US TO THE EFFECT THAT "NOW WAS NOT THE TIME". SHOULFI DID NOT KNOW WHETHER PRESIDENT HAD PERSONALLY SENT THIS MESSAGE OR WHETHER ISSUE HAD BEEN SHORT-STOPPED BY DAOUDI. (COMMENT: I AM INCLINED SUSPECT THE LATTER.) SHOULFI SAID HE WOULD TRY TO RAISE QUESTION WITH PRESIDENT WHEN HE SEES HIM BEFORE LEAVING FOR NEW APPOINTMENT AS SYRIAN AMBASSADOR TO UN. (HE PLANS DEPART DAMASCUS IN MID-APRIL.) SHOULFI URGED ME TO ALSO TAKE UP MATTER WITH ASSAD WHICH I WILL DO ONCE WE GET INITIAL DISCUSSIONS BEHIND US RE SOUTH LEBANON.

6. IN COMING FEW DAYS I WILL DISCUSS QUESTION OF MARRIAGE PETITIONS AGAIN WITH DAOUDI (WHO ALREADY IS IN NEW DELHI PREPARING FOR PRESIDENT'S OFFICIAL VISIT NEXT WEEK), AND IF ATMOSPHERE SEEMS PROPITIOUS WILL LEAVE LIST OF SPECIFIED UNMARRIED WOMEN WITH PRESIDENCY.

7. WE ADVISED SHALOM NOT TO HAVE TOUTAH TURN OVER THE LATEST

PROPOSALS CERTIFIED BY THE DEPARTMENT UNTIL WE HAD RECEIVED THE
ADDITIONAL NEW WHICH SHALOM WILL GET TO DEPARTMENT SOMETIME NEXT WEEK

IT PREFERABLE NOT TO FEED INCOMPLETE BUNCH OF PROPOSALS INTO SECURITY
CHANNELS SINCE IT THEN MORE DIFFICULT TO AMEND THE TOTAL. ALSO,
THIS TIME I WANT TO INITIATE PROCESS FROM PRESIDENCY SO THAT
FAVORABLE DECISION COMES DOWN IN FIRST INSTANCE INSTEAD OF AS
HAPPENED LAST SUMMER WHEN NEGATIVE ANSWER CAME FROM FOREIGN MINISTRY,
RESPONDING TO QUERY FROM SECURITY OFFICIALS WHO HAD RECEIVED THE
ORIGINAL PROPOSALS. WE THEN HAD TO RUN AROUND TO GET DECISION

REVERSED THROUGH DAOUDI.

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8. ACTION REQUESTED: PLEASE CONSULT SHALOM AND ADVISE WHETHER
BUCAI SHOULD BE ADDED TO LIST MAKING TOTAL 52 UNMARRIED WOMEN.
MURPHY

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